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ABSTRACT

This is a report of a Special Joint Committee on the Church and Public Education. The hope is expressed that questions raised within it will stimulate consideration, discussion and reflective action in regard to the role of the church in the education of the American public. Future trends in religion and education, particularly in relation to social change, are discussed. Problems which churches face when called upon to support such issues as school desegregation are mentioned. The concept of "public" in education is examined, and the church's role in serving the public is explored and defined. The issue of previous conflict between church and state is addressed, with an emphasis placed upon a new outlook for current events. Community control of public schools as a response to racial and ethnic tensions within them is discussed. The clergy and other interested Christians are urged to become involved in the consideration of all of these issues. (GC)

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AN OPEN LETTER: THE PUBLIC AND ITS EDUCATION

The Report of the Special Joint Committee on
the Church and Public Education

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Preface

Education is dramatically increasing in importance in our society today. For the past twenty years education has been our chief growth industry. Our single largest occupation is teacher. By 1970 nearly 40 percent of Americans will be engaged in formal schooling. Increasingly large amounts of money--counted in the hundreds of millions--are being spent in education by governments and institutions. Education will play a significant part in shaping the future of our nation and the world. Peter Drucker put it this way:

> "Education is about to take over from the Welfare State as a basic commitment of the American people. One might call this new phenomenon the Knowledge State. Education is bound to become a focus of political life and political conflicts."

In recognition of this importance the Presbytery of Chicago of The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, in 1965, overtured the General Assembly

> Whereas, since the statement on Public Education was issued by the 169th General Assembly (1957), many changes have occurred in urban education, in church-state relations, in the financing of public education, in the more recent interest in the shared time concept as a means of solving an educational problem in a religious pluralistic society, and in other related local, state, and federal programs of affecting public education;

and requested appointment of a "committee of ministers and laymen to review and revise" the 1957 statement. The overture was approved and responsibility assigned to the Board of Christian Education.

Meanwhile, in the same year, the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, aroused by similar concerns, assumed responsibility "for making a study dealing with the Church and public education"; and encouraged participation in the work of the committee now established in the United Presbyterian Church. In 1966, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., authorized participation and the joint committee began to work.

The joint committee included in its membership: Dr. Thelma Adair, then Professor at Queens College and now staff of the United Presbyterian Board of National Missions; Dr. Jack H. Boger, Dean of the School of Education of Winthrop College in South Carolina; Dr. J. W. Edgar, Commissioner of Education in Texas; Dr. Richard A. Gibboney, then Commissioner of Education in Vermont and now Associate Professor of Education in the Graduate School of Education of the University of Pennsylvania; Dr. Thomas F. Green, Professor and Acting Director of the Educational Policy Research Center of Syracuse University; Dr. William B. Kennedy, Secretary for Education of the Board of Christian Education (PCUS); Dr. Robert W. Lynn, Dean of the Auburn Program at Union Theological Seminary in New York City; and Dr. Frank L. Sievers of

the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington, D.C. Dr. Lynn served as chairman, Dr. Kennedy as co-chairman, and Rev. Dean H. Lewis of the Board of Christian Education (UPCUSA) as staff secretary.

The committee held two meetings in 1965. In a long session in June 1966, Professor Paul L. Lehmann of Union Theological Seminary in New York City and Mr. Christopher Jencks of the Institute for Policy Studies were consultants. An early decision was that in the light of radical changes a new statement was needed rather than a "patch and repair" of the 1957 statement. The committee also decided to focus on the purposes and settings of education as well as on specific issues. In the remainder of 1966, the committee engaged several staff consultants--an anthropologist and a student of education--to make inquiries in different parts of the country. These researchers and a member of the committee traveled widely, visiting Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. Contacts were established with schoolmen representing diverse interests and responsibilities, i.e., rural schools, new experiments, etc.

By mid-1967, a first draft of a report had been prepared. To test its understandings, the committee discussed portions of the first, and successive drafts, with some thirty groups between September 1967 and June 1968. These included public schoolmen in Corpus Christi, Texas; a gathering of Roman Catholic and Protestant educators in Wisconsin; gatherings of educational specialists; a meeting of ministers in Ohio; a congregation in New Jersey.

The committee has therefore produced not an inclusive document but a distinctive point of view, not a balanced statement or a definitive answer but an open letter. It raises questions that demand answers instead of giving answers. The style stimulates Christians into considering the relationship between the church and public education, provokes discussion of the important questions, and encourages reflective action.

Wide use of the Open Letter in congregations, presbytery committees, citizen groups, seminaries, schools of education, etc., is essential if it is to achieve its purpose. Unless many readers enter into conversation with others concerning the essential questions and the best answers for their particular situations, the relationship between church and public education will remain quite formal and equally impotent. It is only when we raise questions, propose answers, and engage in putting them into action that a sufficient relationship exists. Welcome to the conversation.

AN OPEN LETTER: THE PUBLIC AND ITS EDUCATION

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PART ONE: The Formation of the Public

This is a letter about schools, churches, and the education of the American public. Though written for Presbyterian churchmen, it is addressed to any citizen who cares about human beings and their education.

I. A Taste of the Future

If you want to anticipate the future, someone has said, look at the world around you. So here are three stories of life from the late 1960's. The episodes are slightly altered so as to avoid any guessing games about original identities. But there is nothing fictional about the difficulties portrayed here. They foretell the shape of things to come.

1.1. Who Cares?

A small congregation, located amid the turbulence of an urban ghetto, edges toward rage over the sort of education offered in the public schools. The recurring charge voiced by parents and pastors: "Our kids can't read. . . . Eighty percent of the children are reading below grade level. The schools neglect the black and Puerto Rican kids. Nobody seems to care."

This discovery comes after several years of hopeful "educational innovations" and "new experiments." Some thought the "Open Enrollment Plan"--a scheme whereby children could be transferred out of their segregated neighborhood school to another school--might be the beginning of a breakthrough. It turned out to be a minor palliative. Project Head Start helped somewhat. Yet all too often a youngster's "head start" melted away in a few months after exposure to the routines of a first-grade classroom. When pressed to explain, local school officials responded, "We're doing the best we can with that population." The implicitly racist tone of this defense does not go unnoticed in the neighborhood.

What can be done? A few members of the congregation have talked--romantically, perhaps--of developing a church-sponsored day school. Their modest success with a church tutoring program has encouraged them to contemplate that extreme measure, an option that even a few years ago they would have dismissed as unnecessary and even un-Protestant. But now they are tempted to give up on the urban school and to go it alone.

It would be a lonely and probably impossible path. Yet the willingness to think in this direction reflects their larger despair over the failure of this city's public schools to be responsive and responsible to its public.

1.2. Strains in an Ecumenical Age

A presbytery is up against a tough decision. It has been asked to join several other organizations in filing a suit challenging federal support to parochial school students via certain provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The other groups include a state P.T.A. and a civil liberties organization--both staunch allies in former fights to defend the cause of public education. The proposed suit would test the legality of the local expressions of the ESEA program. Among these practices are the allocation to parochial schools of textbooks and other materials purchased with federal funds, and the assignment of remedial teachers supported by ESEA money to Catholic classrooms.

The unspoken charges go far deeper. "Such developments," say the advocates of the lawsuit, "amount of special privileged services to the parochial schools. These trends will lead--unless checked--to the decline of the public school system. The pressure of civil rights forces for school integration has inadvertently accelerated the exodus to white private schools, most of which are parochial schools. In short, aid to Catholic schools can strengthen the hold of segregation upon American education."

A serious charge! And it is doubly troubling at a time when the ecumenical spirit, engendered in large part by Pope John and Vatican Council II, has drawn Protestants and Catholics together into new working relationships. The "elder statesmen" in the presbytery do not want to join in the lawsuit, lest they "rock the boat." They want to do nothing that even faintly suggests the old-time Protestant suspicion of Catholic parochial schools. "Wait a couple of years. Then maybe we can talk."

Yet a couple of Catholic "liberals" have warned that silence is a quiet vote for segregation. "Even more important," they say, "Protestants must not be beguiled into supporting an institution that has outlived its usefulness. The parochial school is a leftover from the days when Catholics were defensive against the encroaching power of a Protestant America. That era is now over. Catholics should therefore spend their limited resources upon the education of the poor, new ecumenical ventures with Protestants, etc." These are also the hopes of the "young Turks" in the presbytery. They agree with these Catholics that the parochial system tends to foster a religious ghetto, and therefore contributes to the continuing deformation of the public.

So the battle goes. If you were in that presbytery, amid these conflicting opinions, how would you vote?

1.3. Degrees Aren't Enough

A small band of suburban youngsters want something different out of high school. Last summer in an experimental church project, they caught a glimpse of a new world. As one of them said, "No tests, no worry about scores, no teachers up tight, trying to beat it into you--just the chance to read and feel what is going on in this crazy world." Another: "We all know how to read. But will we ever bother with anything worth reading? Man, I want more than a college degree."

Two teachers in the high school understand and want to help. They know that education is often reduced to a process of clearing one "check-out point" after another: grade school, high school, college, and then what? "The nine-to-five life, the mortgage, the ranch house--these kids are running away from that." -- "An ulcer, gentlemen, is an unwritten poem." But their high school, these teachers believe, might be different if there were some margin of freedom.

Out of their frustration and dreams comes a plan developed jointly by the youngsters and teachers. Their proposal calls for an experimental year for fifty students and two teachers. It involves freedom from the standard curriculum and the fixed "obstacle course" of tests and grades.

The reaction is immediate and--mixed. Almost everyone is for "innovation," especially if it enhances the reputation of the school system. But this plan is "controversial." Anxious parents worry lest it jeopardize their children's chance for good colleges. There is talk about the suggested reading material as being "offbeat," "pornographic," and even "unpatriotic." The town fathers fret about "kooky kids."

The counterpressures against experimentation grow stronger. The high school students appeal to adults, more out of desperation than firm hope.

There is plenty of advice and warning on all sides:

"Don't do anything rash, son; remember the future."
"These kids need something more than school gives them."
"What they need is discipline."
"That Salinger novel is--well, you know--obscene."
"School is a rat race."
"What else is there besides a rat race? Be realistic."
"When I was a boy. . ."

But now that we are adults, what do we have to say in this situation? Anything important?

1.4. Beyond Do's and Don'ts

These stories out of current church life reflect a bewildering acceleration in the pace of change in American education. Ten years ago few social commentators would have anticipated that such problems would face American Protestants in the late 1960's. In fact, it was just twelve years ago that the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. issued a General Assembly Report on "The Church and the Public Schools." That report spoke directly to the anxieties of postwar America about the health of its schools. Among other things its authors fought the widespread apprehension that public education was becoming "godless."

Then in 1957 the Soviet satellite Sputnik spun across the sky. In its wake came a different kind of worry. The schools are failing--so the charge went--to produce enough technologists and scientists to maintain America's place in the "cold war" competition with the Communist bloc.

Since then the tempo of change has sped up considerably. Just look at the world around us. Now there are many cold wars--and some hot ones, too--in American education: the assault of black and Puerto Rican citizens upon urban schools that treat their children in literally "godless" ways; militant teachers on strike; the struggle between the generations as symbolized in that ubiquitous phrase--"student power"; and the charges and countercharges over the meaning of "excellence" or "quality" in education. In each of these skirmishes the American people are being forced to acknowledge, however reluctantly, the power of an inbreaking future.

And so it is appropriate once again to take a fresh look at the topic--"The Church and Public Education." Our intent in this letter is to speak provocatively of the future and its demands. Our aim is not so much to give answers as it is to ask the right questions about American education in the coming decades.

II. Education Is a Public Affair

2.1. A Blurred Line

We begin with a deceptively simple query: What makes a public school public?

Most Americans, if asked to respond, would probably answer along these lines: "That's obvious. A school is public if it is supported by public tax funds, open to all children without charge, and is controlled by a public body."

This commonsense reply presupposes that there is a clean distinction between public and private ventures in education, a boundary marked by differences in finances and control. We think this is a dubious assumption for two reasons. First, it is not nearly so easy to locate that dividing line as it was a few decades ago. Look, for a moment, at the enterprise of higher education. Is Harvard a private university? A considerable portion of the money for its current budget comes from governmental funds of one kind or another. Naturally, then, the university is accountable to public agencies for many of its activities and their contribution to the "national good." What is now true of Harvard and countless other private universities will be increasingly typical of schools of the lower rungs of the educational ladder, i.e., junior colleges, high schools, and elementary schools in the years to come.

With this development will come a growing awareness of a parallel question: If the private schools perform a public function, shouldn't they be supported by public funds? This query implies our second reason for doubting the automatic assumption about a clear boundary between the public and private in education. Function, as well as financing and control, is important in any attempt to define the "public" (or the "private") nature of a human enterprise.

There is nothing new about the question. For years the proponents of state aid have been pressing the same point. Until recently, most non-Catholics have stoutly resisted both the question and the usual answer supplied by parochial school advocates. They have insisted that the religious purpose and private control of parochial schools makes state aid impossible, no matter what public functions these schools might serve. Now, however, the issue must be faced candidly and forthrightly. Can we continue to ignore the contributions, for example, the Catholic schools have made to the education of Americans? Is this not a public affair?

The statistical case alone is impressive. In total numbers, these schools take care of about 14 percent of the country's elementary and secondary school population. Many of those students are concentrated in the large cities: in Chicago and New Orleans, 33 percent of the school population is enrolled in Catholic schools; 39 percent in Philadelphia, 42 percent in Pittsburgh. If the Catholic schools were suddenly to close their doors, the urban public school systems, already overburdened and undermanned, would be inundated.

Yet these facts are not the main reason for concern here. Our proper interest should carry us beyond worrying about saving the taxpayer's money or even more chaos in the urban schools. The root issue is the public's education. Catholic schools participate in the formation of the public as they help to educate responsible and mature human beings. Some, however, may be inadvertently nurturing ignorant bigots--and thereby contributing to the deformation of the public. In either case parochial schools must be included within the perimeter of the Protestant concern for education. Though seemingly "private," their forming or deforming impact is public in both intent and effect.

Will a new Protestant sensitivity to the public character of parochial education mean an easy acceptance of proposals for state aid to Catholic schools? We hope not, for that would be just another sentimental gesture of ecumenical goodwill. No one is being asked to muzzle honest criticism. But if Protestants understand that what happens in the parochial schools simply "somebody else"s business," responsible criticism has a different basis. What happens in all schools--"private" or "public"--is finally the business of the public.

But what is it, then, that enables us to say of any school that it performs its public function well or poorly? What is education?

2.2. Education as the Formation of the Public

Another bit of our conventional wisdom is revealed in a typical exchange between two strangers.

"Where did you get your education?" someone inquires politely.
The usual answer: "In the _____ School system."
Or, "At_____ High School." Or, "At_____ College."

And then the conversation moves on. But for that moment two strangers have met on common ground; they shared the widespread notion that education equals formal schooling. Common sense? Yes--and also, we think, nonsense.

Of course schools are important. In America, as in other highly developed societies, the function of providing skilled manpower for the economy has been given to the schools. The network of institutions from kindergarten to the university has become a vast "selecting and sorting" system. It seeks to produce what our economy appears to require of it. We do not deny the importance of this function, nor begrudge its necessity. But there is something more to education. Remember the high school students who want something more than a "rat race." It is that "something more" which we want to stress in this letter.

Education is the formation of the public, the sum of all those ways in which men recognize and accept their solidarity with one another. "Public" and "education" thus conceived belong together. That is what "public education" is all about, and what makes any well-conceived system of education public.

This interpretation is just a shorthand version of an enduring and honorable theme. Consider the ancient Greeks, for example. When a Greek boy became a man, he participated in the public. Indeed, it was only in the life of the public, together with others who were his equals, that he truly became a man. Their thinkers had a quaint way of describing a man. They said that he is, by nature, a public animal. And so education was seen as the preparation of a youngster to assume his public role. The Greeks never discussed education apart from the life of the public. The same outlook has been evident in every high moment of educational thought in the intervening centuries.

Since this is a letter to American Presbyterians, we can say to our fellow churchmen: Look at our own history. Presbyterians inherit a strong commitment to public ventures in education, a concern that stretches back in history well before the creation of the American "common schools." You may recall John Calvin's part in starting a public university in Geneva, or Knox's interest in Scottish schools for all children. They were, to be sure, convinced that the people of God should be able to read the Bible. But that is only part of the story. Their first concern was for the education of the public, for the growth of men who could faithfully serve God and their neighbors in the life of the public. And that is where the emphasis should be in our time and place.

In the Presbyterian tradition at its best, the essential loyalty is to the public schools as an instrument of that larger purpose. The work of the contemporary public school, as well as that of the private school, is to be seen and criticized in the light of the prior commitment. Do these schools help us to become public persons, to take up the burden of responsibility and not let others "do politics" for us? Do our schools--"private" or "public"--contribute to the formation of the public? In sum: first things first.

It is easy to lose sight of this ordering of priorities--and especially so for Presbyterians in this country. Almost from the beginning of the American public school, Presbyterians have been among its foremost supporters. That devotion, rightly understood, is rooted in a concern for the public's education and not necessarily in a blind commitment to the public schools as its instrument. Therefore, if we can be faithful to the best of the past, we will be free

to reexamine our ways of thinking and acting. The cause of public education does not need another ecclesiastical cheerleader who roots unblinkingly for the public schools. Rather we can move to express in new and fresh ways our first commitment: to help all schools perform their proper work in forming the public and in raising up men who will serve the Lord through proper service of the commonweal.

2.3. Intimations of the Public

To form the public, to serve the commonweal--these are worthy ends. No one is apt to dispute such goals, especially if they remain abstractions. But now come the tough questions: Where is that public in a tangible and incarnate form? Can one point to a nation or a state and say, "Here it is"? Perhaps others can offer quick answers; we are reluctant to do so. As a matter of fact we think it is impossible to define the public in any precise way.

That is a strange admission to make in a letter about public education. Yet it could be our major contribution to this discussion. Most commentators usually slip about this difficult issue by equating the work of the public with the government or else by using "public" as another expression for the American people. Neither answer contributes very much to an understanding of the public and its education. Instead of evading the problem, let's face it directly and ask why.

The difficulty is rooted in the nature of the public as a mysterious and elusive reality. It reflects the process by which God creates, for he is never finished or done with his acts of political creation. And so, at best, we have only intimations of its changing presence. Sometimes we recognize the public in a crisis: a President is murdered, November 22, 1963; or the threat of war, Pearl Harbor Day; sometimes an emergency jars us out of comforting routines: a forest fire, a riot. Or the public becomes visible in those rare occasions when we are challenged by a common heritage and destiny: That August afternoon before the Lincoln Memorial and Martin Luther King, Jr., saying, "I have a dream."

In these moments, that which divides us falls away and, for once, seems pitifully unimportant. And then we know, if only in part, that in some inexplicable way we actually do belong to one another--the mighty and the weak, the rich and the poor alike. But that recognition fades away and we lapse back into the world of the day after the funeral, the postwar years. That dream is deferred and "life" goes on.

If any awareness of our membership in the public persists, it does so because we are possessed by a story, the memory of a living

past, or a symbol that reminds us of our tie to one another. Take the ancient Israelites as one illustration of this process. God's gift to the people of the Old Testament was the Torah, a story that defined their identity, maintained a solidarity rooted in justice, and kept them together when all else was gone. The modern American also has his "torahs." Many symbols recall, at least in an ideal form, the ties that bind us together: the dream of liberty for all; the guarantees of justice and equality for everyone; a government of, by, and for the people. But the symbols we actually live by all too often deny the larger solidarity revealed in those splendid moments of public awareness. They call us to a loyalty that divides rather than unites.

"What symbols?" you ask.

. Sometimes the symbol is the color of skin--a limiting, restrictive and ultimately diabolical negation of the larger public. Think not only of South Africa and its policy of apartheid, but also of the U.S.A., where men can still say, "I'm white" or "I'm black" as though these statements define their final identity as human beings.

. Sometimes a flag is made into the emblem of the public. And so we use the "public" and "the American people" as interchangeable terms. This will not do any longer. The public is not confined to one continent or a single nation.

. Sometimes the symbol that commands our loyalty is the slogan of a segment of the public. We consciously--or more often, unconsciously--equate the "public interest" with such bits of rhetoric as the "free enterprise system," "participatory democracy," "states' rights," "New Deal,"or "property rights." Such slogans may describe aspects of the public's work, but they do not provide the cohesion that holds the public together.

. Sometimes the symbol is nothing more exalted than a social convention such as the length of a skirt or the cut of hair. If that seems farfetched, recall the anxiety and furor caused by the hippies, or contemplate the ways in which high schools can become embroiled in silly controversies over mini-skirts and haircuts. In our time hair has become a potent symbol of identity.

. And then sometimes the symbol is a religious concept out of our past. In early American life the Protestant notion of the "holy commonwealth" was a compelling representation of the public and its claim. That era is gone. Similarly, the nineteenth-century ideal of America as a "Christian nation" served as a symbol of the public. Even today some of us want to hold onto that understanding of the American identity. But this symbol, too, is no longer fitting in a society as diverse as ours.

Indeed none of these symbols can mediate the claim of the contemporary public. What is required is a vivid image of how we are united beyond the contending loyalties of race and nation, class and religion. And that is exactly what is missing today. Such phrases as "We the people" have become rhetorical flourishes, empty of offense and powerless to move us beyond the constrictions of color and economic interest.

Take another look at the list of symbols. Each one tempts us to neglect some part of the public, to exclude someone. When our loyalties are limited, for instance to the immediate family, we may forget the claim of our neighbor. When our loyalties extend to the neighborhood, then we are apt to forget those just beyond. Or if they are limited to surbanites, we can neglect the claim of those in the city. And when our loyalties range outward to the nation and beyond, then we may not be able to hear the cry of the nearest human being. In short, how can we love or be loyal to both the far and the near, the many as well as the one? Or--in the language of Christian theology--what is the proper object of love?

Although Christians cannot claim to supply the missing symbols, they do know something of consummate importance. In the Christian tradition at its best, there is a strong affirmation of a deep and powerful human commonality uniting all men, everywhere and all the time. This bond is evident in the midst of and beyond all fractures and divisions, class interests and national boundaries, color lines and religious differences. It is the gift of God, inherent in creation and confirmed in Jesus Christ.

In the Christ event, the issue of human solidarity was settled once and for all. We believe it is a given reality, whether or not it is recognized and honored. Our solidarity, rooted as it is in God's action, is both an inviolable inheritance and the promise of the future. It is the solidarity, the commonality of man, not the togetherness of Christians or religious folk or Americans or whatever, but of <u>man</u>, that underlies the public.

We understand the existence of this solidarity as the work of God through whose chastening grace man can become the public person he is created to be. For us, God is the proper object of love, outside of all limited loyalties, because he provides the solidarity and commonality that sustains the public by calling men out of themselves to himself. To be called out of oneself is to become the public man. And that means (among other things):

. To hear the near and the far: the voice of that distant ghetto parent who cries out against his children's school, "Nobody cares"; the high school youngster who says, "I want more than a college degree out of life," or the child in the "good suburban school" who is quietly being robbed of creativity and individuality.

. To reject the kind of love that starts outward but then curves back toward self, all in the name of loyalty to family and job, God and country; to break through these curved-in loyalties which are denials of human solidarity.

. To support those who serve the public's formation and reformation through education: parents struggling for quality education for their own and for all children; teachers trying to use the union movement to bring greater freedom and excellence in the schools; administrators and school board members working in the face of public apathy to secure adequate financing for quality education; federal officials and others striving to overcome the deforming effects of racial segregation in education.

. To fight those who would (intentionally or not) deform the public: school boards who prattle about the "ideal of the neighborhood school" as a means of masquerading vicious racial prejudice; hostile teachers; parents indifferent to the education of any child except their own; special interest groups who violate the freedom of the teacher in the classroom.

. To be politically competent in these fights; to know how and where to apply pressure; to do the drudge organizational work behind the scenes; to endure the frequent loneliness, boredom, and despair that comes to anyone engaged in politics.

In affirming man's commonality we do not stand alone. The Jew, the Marxist, the nonreligious humanist--these men and many more have honored much the same reality, though they claim a different source. God is on the search for public men who can perceive those occasional intimations of solidarity, and then expand and strengthen them. He is calling us to participate in the formation of the greater public yet to come.

And the churches' response? Here is our version of how Christians can proceed in the days ahead. In the confines of this letter we have space only to touch upon two sets of problems.

PART TWO: A New Agenda for the 1970's

III. Church and State

If any group of churchmen want to understand the claim of solidarity, they must first attend to its implications for the churches.

And so we begin by asking ourselves, What would happen to the usual perspectives on church-state issues in education if American churchmen looked beyond their own special interests to the formation of a public? This question is not the number one item on the agenda for the 1970's. But unless the churches speak on these matters with a a new freedom and candor, their word on more pressing problems will not be (and will not deserve to be) taken very seriously by anyone.

3.1. Not What It Used to Be

Almost inevitably a battle over church-state matters will mark the future. The furor over the Supreme Court decisions of 1962 and 1963 (The Regents' Prayer and Bible-reading cases) has abated somewhat in recent years. But the moral confusion that hung over the nations's reception of these findings in the early 1960's will doubtless persist into the coming decade. There is evidence on every side that many Americans still do not understand the high court's intention. To wit: Senator Everett Dirksen's plea for a constitutional amendment permitting voluntary prayers in the classroom has attracted quiet support across the country. Yet the Supreme Court never ruled against truly voluntary prayer; instead it said that the state cannot mandate voluntary prayer. There is little meaning in the "Dirksen plan." Even so, we can anticipate that a latter-day version of it will crop up in the disputes of the 1970's.

The more significant battle on the church-state frontier will occur on other terrain. The Roman Catholic parochial schools are in the worst financial straits of their life in America. Two forces bear in upon the Catholic educator: the spiraling pressures of inflation and a declining rate of those electing religious occupations. One possible way out of the squeeze is the tantalizing prospect of governmental aid. Not all Catholics would welcome that development. Some would prefer to see the Catholic school system phased out of existence or else restricted to a smaller number of experimentally oriented schools. But the majority of Catholic school officials still look to Washington and the state capitals for help. The likely outcome is a head-on collision in the 1970's.

It may be an unseemly breach of ecumenical piety to describe the future so bluntly. Nowadays few of us enjoy the prospect of a clash between Catholics and non-Catholics. Remember the embarras-

sment in the presbytery over the lawsuit. "Wait a couple of years. Then maybe we can talk." But time--by itself--does not solve anything.

For the next few years there will be significant differences between Protestant and Catholic spokesmen over these matters. It is partly a difference in theological and political perspectives. Both see themselves as defenders of the public interest. Catholics are proud of their schools' part in the formation of the public, while Protestants fear the spawning of divisive loyalties and substandard schools under church aegis. We respect these differences and the arguments they provoke; such appeals to tradition and principles have an importance all their own. But, even so, what is left unsaid is often more significant.

If our guess is correct, neither side has "come clean" about their anxieties and motivations in this fight. Both have an understandably difficult time confessing how the instinct for group preservation forms their thinking. Many a Protestant, for instance, fears that public aid for parochial schools will thrust the Catholic Church dramatically ahead in the race for power and prominence in American life. He is not about to let that happen, even if his resistance causes an ecumenical flap. Meanwhile a fair number of Roman Catholics fret lest the threatened demise of their schools rob them of hard-earned gains and make it impossible to raise their children as good Catholics. And they, too, are not going to let go without a struggle.

The story is the same elsewhere. Take, for example, the study of religion in the public school. It has now been six years since the Supreme Court Bible-reading decision explicitly endorsed "objective" teaching about religion as an alternative to "devotional" exercises in the public school classrooms. The intervening years have brought much talk about this option--and modest progress here and there in scattered schools across the country. What intrigues us, however, is the marked difference in the response of Christian and Jew.

American Christians (Catholics and Protestants alike) have generally favored this possibility. In contrast, Jewish spokesmen have not been so optimistic about the so-called "objectivity" of the study of religion in a Gentile-dominated culture. Why the split verdict? Both faith communities reflect their own perceptions. Perhaps it requires a majority--or at least a group that thinks it is in a predominant position--to believe in the possibility of an "objective" analysis of anything so elusive and occasionally powerful as religion in America. On the other side, the minority perception is clearly mirrored in the skepticism of many Jewish leaders. Two thousand years of history have taught them to be watchful of another Gentile power play. They do not see how--even with the best of intentions--the study of religion will be much different from the ubiquitous and demeaning worship services now banned.

We cannot settle those differences here. Just accept it as another illustration of the human problem reflected in the quarrel over aid to parochial schools. None of us--Catholic or Protestant, Christian or Jew--easily admits to the presence of collective self-interest in our church-state stands. But the world sees through our earnest attempts to disguise our self-interest by appeals to political and religious tradition. They see us trying to shape the whole public to a particular religious tradition whether we recognize it or not.

The churches and the synagogues once did have decisive influence in shaping American society. Look again at the meaning of the now outlawed practices of Bible-reading and prayers in the classroom. The upshot of these "religious devotions" was to confer and confirm a sense of identity of the American people. In the luxury of retrospect you can see three stages in this development. One hundred years ago this kind of activity was the symbol of a Protestant public. Toward the end of the nineteenth century the emphasis shifted to a Christian public. In the last few decades "religious devotions" became a reminder of the character of the American people as a religious public. Now none of these definitions is either fitting or accurate. The religious forces in this country are no longer the definers and shapers of the public.

Things are not what they used to be. It is hard to take, no matter how skillfully we mask our feelings. And yet this turn of events could be the greatest gift--and challenge--ever offered the religious forces in America. No longer do we have to strain under the burden of being the architects of the American consensus. Now we are free to make our own distinctive contribution to the formation of the public. The churches have been liberated for a new kind of public service.

3.2. For the Public Benefit

It is dangerously easy to speak of "public service." This phrase has become part of the cant of our time. Everyone can accept this ideal, especially if it does not threaten or disturb our convictions and institutions. And so we must be quite specific here.

a. Let's begin by glancing at Protestant efforts in schooling, a topic that should disturb any advocate of public responsibility. All too often American Protestants think of church schooling as "our own business"--a private affair, so to speak. That will no longer do. We believe that every decision about a Sunday school building, a teacher training program, a curriculum, or anything else in the traditional domain of Christian education has a public dimension.

Take, for example, the seemingly small matter of church school buildings. For decades American Protestantism has poured hundreds of millions of dollars into church school facilities for use primarily on Sunday morning. The Sunday school "wing" is often the most wasted building space in America. It could be otherwise. Instead of

duplicating existing facilities in nearby churches, a congregation might offer the public an educational center not available elsewhere--a library for a rural area, an adult study center in a new suburban development, etc. Or better yet, Presbyterians might call a moratorium on all church building projects except as they arise out of a planning process that involves all the different educational agencies in a community. The examples may be trivial; indeed, we hope you will supply better ones. But the point is very important to anyone who claims the mantle of the Reformed tradition. Our possessions, our lives are not our own; they belong to God and to his work in fashioning the public.

That kind of faith creates some demanding self-expectations. We can be expected to know, for instance, that the public's education requires the transformation of class values, regional and religious prejudices, and racial fears. We can also expect to discover that our efforts in church schooling often reinforce these curved-in loyalties and thus unwittingly deform the public.

But confession alone is not enough. We can also work for the day when the churches will use their resources--time and energy as well as money--in doing what others cannot or will not do. A couple of years ago that might have meant that denominational boards would have diverted part of their attention from production of competive church school curriculum materials to the task of providing curricular resources in black history and culture for American schools, private or public. Today it could mean that a congregation will throw its resources into a crash reading program or the development of temporary summer "storefront" or "cottage" schools. And tomorrow? We only know for sure that God is pushing the churches beyond the outmoded assumption that Church schooling is a private matter.

b. American Protestants can keep the question "How do we contribute to the formation of the public?" in mind as they contemplate the new possibilities of the study of religion in the public schools. During the last four decades the study of religion has gradually become a natural part of the offerings of colleges and universities. In all probability it will become more characteristic of the high school curriculum during the next forty years.

But there are dangers in this development. At present there are a very few appropriate curricular aids for any high school that is willing to take on this hazardous enterprise. Some churchmen are urging public schools to accept materials that bear a suspicious resemblance to church school programs. These offerings are not only "sectarian" (a convenient epithet that is rapidly losing whatever meaning it had had in the past); more important, they hinder any competent and fair-minded inquiry into religion in a pluralistic society. Also there are not many well-trained teachers available. And finally most public schools still do not enjoy the freedom of

dealing with controversial subjects without fear of community reprisal. Just imagine, if you will, the storm that might break out in most American communities if their schools launched a religious literature course in which the teacher used contemporary Biblical scholarship.

Therefore, we hope that Protestant churchmen will go slow in any direct approach to the public schools in this matter. School administrators and teachers are understandably skeptical of the well-intentioned but fumbling offers of help from pastors, interested laymen, and councils of churches across the country. They perceive our efforts as another instance of pressure applied by a special interest group.

Instead, we would encourage American Protestants--and especially the Presbyterian denominations--to give substantial support to a trusted intermediary (a university or foundation) which in turn could develop adequate curricular materials and some pilot teacher training programs. That would be a public way of serving the needs of the schools. The study of religion should be done well--or not at all. In any event, we must avoid even a hint of self-serving tactics, for such are the ways of deforming the public.

c. Last we must say something about the churches' response in the days ahead to the fight over state aid for parochial schools. Before the 1960's there was little doubt about where the majority of Presbyterians would stand on this matter. In 1957, for example, the General Assembly (Presbyterian U.S.A. Minutes, Part I, p. 107 a.) said, "We. . . are unalterably opposed to the support of independent or parochial schools through the use of public funds." The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church U.S. issued similar statements in 1945, 1947, and most recently in 1962. We believe that these statements are no longer adequate. They do not reflect the current context or a full understanding of the public and its education. Since public funds are going to parochial schools, largely by way of arrangements worked out in the Education Act of 1965, the relevant question now becomes, "Under what conditions and constraints should aid be granted to parochial schools for their contribution to the education of the public?"

We do not believe that there is a single, uniform answer, one that will fit every situation. Doubtless some observers would point to the "child benefit" theory, i.e., the government can aid the child, but not his school. But this interpretation grows increasingly strained as it is stretched to cover a multitude of emerging complexities. Our guess is that a new legal doctrine will be developing over the next two decades as successive cases are decided by the courts. For want of a better term, we would describe it as the "public benefit" theory, i.e., the state can aid a "nonpublic school if is is performing a public function.

If that is the shape of the future, then all of us will confront

new and disturbing pressures. American Protestantism will be forced--as never before in history--to face the issue: Are the parochial schools a public venture in education? Do they contribute to the formation of the public? A very tough question. In all likelihood we will want to evade it. Old prejudices or currently fashionable sentimentality may prompt superficial and premature responses. But to succumb to that temptation is, indeed, to forfeit our responsibility and so deform the public. By the same standard Roman Catholics will confront the challenge of this issue as never before. It is not self-evident, to many, Catholic and Protestant alike, that parochial schools do perform a public function.

Out of the struggle with these questions could come a new era in the facing of church-state problems, a period marked by freedom and candor, and a time in which Protestant and Catholic will recognize a common responsibility to the public and its education.

Now let us turn to a far more significant range of issues.

IV. Whom are the Schools For?

Some headlines from newspapers in the late 1960's:

Talks to Prevent
Strike in Schools
Broken Off Here

Veteran Educator
Warns Against
Student Power

State Teachers Ignore
Gov.'s "Peace Plan";
Walkout in 3d Week

School Board
Opposes
Decentraliza-
tion Plan

In these accounts you can discern a larger story in the making, a dispute that will touch the lives of Americans in every region and stratum of national life. Who will control the schools? The fight over this issue is as old as the history of American public education. But in the last few years it has become a new and vividly felt problem.

One "sign of the times"is the arrival of the Federal Government on the scene. In the past, the U.S. Office of Education

has traditionally played a minor role in the politics of American education. That tradition is now being broken. As a result of "Great Society" legislation, the Office has stimulated innovations widely through challenge funds, and has forced needed changes in many ways. It's budget has risen dramatically--so dramatically, in fact, that you hear considerable talk about the danger of federal control of education. In a confused political situation where the "New Left" and the old right agree at least on one thing--the best government is the one closest to home--people are uncommonly suspicious of Washington's intent and ideas.

Some of these fears strike us as needless and farfetched. Despite the recent jump in education expenditures, the average federal aid for each "disadvantaged child" is $92 per year. That is not a sum calculated to start revolutions, nor--unhappily--to produce startling results in the lives of the children. No one knows what the future will bring. Can U.S. grants and programs provide the necessary leverage to pry changes out of the local school establishment? Or will the federal presence merely reinforce the power of the educational status quo?

4.1 Community Control

In any event the more explosive possibilities lie elsewhere. One of the groups vying to bend the future comes out of the urban ghettos. In conversations with ghetto residents across the country we heard a persistent criticism of the schools. It can be summed up in this way: These schools are "public" in name and formal appearance alone; in actual operations they fail to be responsible to their true public, i.e., the youngsters, parents, and neighbors. The real public, in their estimate, is not the abstract entity presumably represented by the city-wide board of education, the state department of public instruction, etc.; instead it is the local community. And so they want "community participation" in the running of ghetto education, or decentralization of the urban school systems, or any rearrangement that grants the ghettos some measure of control over their own schools.

But our version of what they are saying is only a pale, academic translation of a cry of protest. Hear them out for yourself:

> "The _____ School Committee couldn't care less about the local community and what we want."... "The school system is run by the power structures downtown."... "Parents are never heard."... "The school people are paternalistic, racist. We are treated like a colonial people."... "The public schools are run for the protection of the top administrators, not the children or the teachers."... "'Public control' really means absentee ownership."... "These are not our schools. They don't belong to the people."... "Don't call it the Board of Education; it's the Board of Mis-education."... "They talk about protecting teachers' rights, but they really want to kill community control."

Harsh words and damning charges. They do not go unnoticed in different quarters. The school adm inistrators and state boards of education are "on guard" lest their powers and responsibilities be clipped in the coming years. Likewise the classroom teachers know that they have much to gain or lose in the 1970's. Their major organizations--the small but burgeoning American Federation of Teachers (AFT), an affiliate of the AFL-CIO, and the large, more well established National Education Association (NEA)--express a militancy far removed from the old myths about the timid schoolmarm and dear Mr. Chips. This newfound aggressiveness emerges out of different sources: a stiffening competition between the AFT and NEA for the right to represent the classroom teachers; the drive for decent salaries, better work conditions and job security; a desire for better schools; last--and most important for our interests here--a growing readiness to combat political moves toward any more "community participation" in the running of the schools or "decentralization" of large school systems.

The teachers' spokesmen are plainly skeptical about the wisdom of community control and decentralization. Why? Because such schemes, they say, could mean a reactionary return to the day when the principle of "lay control" of the schools amounted to a happy hunting license for meddlesome politicians, heresy watchers and would-be educational reformers, each of whom "knows" what is best for public education. Their argument: There are already too many powerful groups promoting their special interest, i.e., more patriotic textbooks, attention to the history of different ethnic groups, etc. Don't encourage them even more. Instead, give teachers the freedom to make their own choices, to do their job without interference from outsiders. You don't tell a surgeon how to operate, do you? Then allow a teacher the right to be a professional. That is the way toward reform of the schools.

So the battle goes. The charges and counterthrusts grow apace. We do not imagine ourselves mediators in this struggle. Neither do we claim to know how the issue should be settled in every city and state in the nation. That would be an exercise in pretension and folly. But we do know this much. There is more involved in this fight than just the usual tension between laymen and professional. And don't dismiss it as just another crisis that will be forgotten next year admid a new crop of disasters. This struggle has been long in coming, and it will be with us for years to come. For what is at stake here is the future health and viability of life in our cities.

Let us explain why this is so.

4.2. Racial and Ethnic Tensions

Our point of departure is the consideration of two factors, neither of which is always visible in this conflict. First, no one can fully understand the situation apart from the tensions in America between racial and ethnic groups. The struggle over "community control" is in large measure between predominantly white school staffs and the parents of black, brown, and red children. If you doubt this, consider the following statistics: in New York City (in the summer, 1968) more than

50 percent of the pupils are black and Puerto Rican; yet less than 9 percent of the teachers are black or Puerto Rican. There are 865 possible openings for principals in this system; the number of black principals can be counted on the fingers of your two hands. Of course that will change over the course of the coming years. Nevertheless the dynamics for "confrontation" are still there.

Then consider the nature of inheritance in contemporary America. The form of a patrimony is quite different from what it was just a few generations ago. In an earlier day a parent passed on property to his children. But nowadays most of us have come to assume that schooling is the best expression of patrimony. A middle-class parent, for example, speaks of giving his child a college education in much the same way that his forefathers thought of handing on a farm, business, or even a practice.

Almost inevitably then, schools have become a matter of intense concern and anxiety to parents. And doubly so for the ghetto dweller, for he knows, better than an outsider, what lies ahead for his offspring if the child is subjected to the usual ghetto school. The meaning of that future is slavery. Slavery may have been declared illegal in the United States. Functional slavery still flourishes. According to an ancient definition, slavery is the condition of the man who is in but not of the world; the slave exists, but does not participate fully and freely in the powers and decisions of this world. In other words, a living death or a crippling, prisoner's life. And that is exactly the fate that a ghetto parent foresees for his children--unless, perchance, they go to a school that is not an academic graveyard.

It is all the more understandable that these parents should resent the inept and often disastrous treatment accorded their children in the city public school. While they acknowledge the difficulty of the school's task in dealing with a flood of immigrants from rural America, they also know that the public schools somehow served the needs of earlier generations of white immigrants. The Jews, the Irish, and the Germans, after a period of conflict, were able to use the American public school as a path toward civic equality. But in the late twentieth century the ghetto schools usually offer one-way passage to second-class citizenship. In this situation racial and ethnic minorities face a horrifying reflection of the truth about white America. That truth was stated in clear and unmistakable language by the United Presbyterian General Assembly's (1968) pronouncement on "The Crisis in the Cities": "The white race has committed a violent and destructive aggression upon the upon the black race in America and continues to use its overwhelmingly superior power in American society to frustrate, dehumanize, and deny the existence and aspirations of black people." No wonder, then, that black, brown, and red citizens often view the public school as an instrument of white oppression.

That realization provokes radical thought and action by ghetto militans. And hopefully the rest will be provoked into recognizing

the depth of the problem before all of us. For the militants have taken the lead in asking a question that every American must face.

4.3. The Public's School

Whom are the schools for?

Not, we would say, for any race. At first reading that appears to be one of those predictable statements which one would expect to find in a contemporary church document. We want, however, to go beyond talk about desegration or integration, important as these imperatives are. The basic problem is the denial of human solidarity and a deformation of the public. This is the nub of the matter. If color becomes the badge of humanity, then a sick society deforms the public.

Whom are the schools for? Not the school bureaucracy or their allies in the teachers colleges. When administrators and teachers act as though they own the schools, they violate the nature of the public's school. Sometimes this violation is justified in the name of professionalism. Let us be clear on the point involved here. Our quarrel is not with professionalism but with paternalism. The professional is often described as one with the requisite knowledge and skills, recognition by colleagues, etc. But another mark of the professional is that he is asked by the laymen to make a decision. Knowledge and skill alone are never enough. No matter what his competence and expertise, the teacher has professional authority only when he enjoys the respect and trust of the immediate public, the parents and children who invite him to make decisions on their behalf. Otherwise he becomes the unwitting reminder of a paternalism that gives (often generously) without ever being asked, or never gives without being pressured. It is that spirit, intended or not, which destroys any sense of mutuality. Those in our society who protest against paternalism are really crying out against a negation of human solidarity and a deformation of the public.

But the schoolman has no monopoly upon paternalism. Whom are the schools for? Not only for the local community. The advocates of "community control" can be paternalistic also. They can ignore federal guidelines for desegregating school systems as the work of people who do not have the knowledge and competence to make that decision. Or they "forget" the rights of teachers and destroy their morale, all because of "the community." "The community" is no more acceptable a tyrant than an unfeeling and inept profession. Think back to the story of the high school students and teachers. What protection did they have against the provincialism of the community?

No, the schools do not exist for the profession or the local community. The schools are for the public and its formation. If

we keep that affirmation in mind, then we can begin to work new and fresh ways for the strengthening of the profession and the development of plans for community and student participation in the making of school policy. Because of our fundamental commitment to the public's education, we will be on the search for alternative public school systems to replace the present inadequate structures. There are many possibilities: regional state schools that would be financed by states and could cut across the urban-suburban boundaries; a network of federally financed boarding schools that would allow for genuine diversity in the student body; true "community schools" open to the contributions of those outside the school profession--the block worker who knows the "streets," its languages and problems; the mother with a knack for dealing with youngsters; or artists in the community.

These are just a few of the options that deserve exploration. We urge our fellow Presbyterians to join with others in their development. Now the conversation we have tried to initiate returns to those who are working at these problems in local situations. We encourage them to continue it.

For instance, here are some of the kinds of questions that could launch continuing exploration: (1) Could our denominational boards of education reallocate their support to devote more to the church's experimental work in new ways of public schooling? (2) Can new interdenominational groups tackle together some of these matters at local, regional, and national levels? (3) Why shouldn't the church contribute to the establishment of skill banks to identify existing and needed resources that could be made available upon call by all schools? (4) Can seminaries and church higher education unite with universities and foundations in developing effective resource materials for analysis and study of the relationship of religion to education for the public?

These initial steps mark just a beginning of a new expression of an old commitment: a concern with the public for its education. We offer these suggestions as a way of inviting your response---and, we hope, a continuing conversation about the public and its education.

Where do you stand?
What are you going to do?
How can we help one another--and so participate in the forming of the greater public to come?